

## Physical Education Teacher Is Back on the Move, Thanks to RETAINWORKS

May 2023 RETAIN Success Story

RETAINWORKS helped a busy physical education (PE) teacher who was also a mom develop an effective stay-at-work (SAW) plan after a serious knee injury sidelined her and kept her from work and her active lifestyle. For Lindsay, RETAINWORKS is “amazing people that have you at the center of everything. It’s a group of people that want you to get back doing what you need to do for your job, for your life, for your mental health, for your physical wellness.”

### BACKGROUND

As a PE teacher, Lindsay, thirty-nine, spends most of her days on her feet teaching health and fitness classes to middle school students. She loves her job and takes a hands-on approach that keeps her students engaged. When she is not at work, she is busy parenting two high-energy sons, hiking and camping with her family, playing pickleball with friends, and volunteering in her community.

### CHALLENGE

Until the fall of 2022, Lindsay never had an injury that affected her work or active lifestyle. Then Lindsay seriously injured her knee at work while playing kickball with her students. She had surgery, followed by several weeks off from work. She had a slow recovery with limited physical activity.

The injury also took a toll on her mental health. Having an active lifestyle and participating with her students is important to Lindsay. After the injury, she had to learn different ways to relieve stress and interact with her family and students. She noted that “my knee doesn’t always want to do what I want it to do. ...[but] my job is I’m always on my feet. I’m always moving.”

Lindsay had connected with workers’ compensation services. However, she shared that it was “... just doctor’s appointments, the claims and all. But that was all injury related. It wasn’t mental health related. It wasn’t a person saying, ‘hey, are you OK? I know you’re injured, but are you OK?’”



### Challenge-Action-Results

**Challenge:** A PE teacher with a serious knee injury struggled with returning to work and the active lifestyle that she loved.



**Action:** RETAINWORKS developed a personalized plan with the participant that included physical therapy and workplace modifications. At regular check-ins, RETAINWORKS staff coached her on strategies to accommodate her injury and recovery.

**Results:** The participant returned to work with modifications that fit her teaching style. She followed through on PT guidelines at home and school. These tools helped support the participant through a second surgery.

## ACTIONS

Jodi Hearn, the RETAINWORKS referral and enrollment lead at Ascension Via Christi Health in Wichita, Kansas, knew Lindsay through the parent-teacher organization at her school. She heard about Lindsay's injury and thought that the RETAINWORKS program could help. Jodi reached out to Lindsay while she was still at home recovering from her surgery and unable to put any weight on her injured knee.

**Reviewed SAW strategies and available supports.** Jodi explained that RETAINWORKS could help Lindsay develop a plan with the supports she needed to safely get back to work and her day-to-day life. These supports could include additional health-care referrals, guidance on workplace modifications, connections to financial support, help with job searches, or even job retraining.

Lindsay was hesitant to participate with RETAIN at first. "I was like, oh no, not one more thing to deal with. But Jodi thought it would help me out a lot. So I looked and thought, OK, I can do this. And I'm very glad I did."

**Assessed needs.** Lindsay met with Jodi to assess the support and services needed to create a successful SAW plan. "That was definitely a learning curve of figuring out how I could be on my feet and still get from place to place, but also not go home at the end of the day and just want to cry because my leg was so swollen and hurt," Lindsay said.

**Coordinated support.** Once Lindsay's SAW plan was complete, she was put in touch with a RETAINWORKS nurse navigator. The nurse navigator helped Lindsay obtain physical therapy services and provided instructions for using a scooter and knee brace to get around at school. Together Lindsay and the nurse navigator created a schedule for icing and elevating her leg during the day. They also developed a strategy to continue her at-home physical therapy exercises.

The RETAINWORKS nurse navigator checked in regularly by phone or text for eight weeks after Lindsay returned to work. The navigator asked Lindsay how she was doing at home and work, both physically and emotionally. They coached her on strategies to deal with her injury and recovery. Lindsay said the calls motivated her to follow through on the recommendations from her doctor and physical therapist. She appreciated the personal and caring approach.

The RETAINWORKS nurse navigator also reviewed notes from Lindsay's health-care appointments and provided Lindsay with clear, written summaries. "Sometimes when you go to the doctor, you don't always remember everything that was said," Lindsay said. "Or you kind of took it a different way. So the paper that I got after each doctor visit was really beneficial."

## RESULTS

Lindsay is thrilled that she was able to stay at her job despite her knee injury. She reports that RETAINWORKS supported her every step of the way.

According to Lindsay, the regular check-ins and follow-up notes were the most helpful parts of the program. "That personal check-in was huge. I was not in a very great mindset because I've

never experienced anything like that,” Lindsay said. “That changed my whole world. Initially, the check-ins were more often...to see if I was doing okay and answer questions about what supports I needed, and encouragement to implement physical therapy and the doctor’s recommendations. As I got back to work and my recovery progressed, the check-ins were less frequent, which felt right,” Lindsay said.

After completing the RETAINWORKS program, Lindsay learned she would need a second surgery to improve her range of motion. This time, she had tools to aid her recovery from the surgery and quickly return to work. She knows that if she needs support, she can turn to RETAINWORKS. For Lindsay, RETAINWORKS is

*“amazing people that have you at the center of everything. It’s a group of people that want you to get back doing what you need to do for your job, for your life, for your mental health, for your physical wellness.”*

## KEY TAKEAWAYS

By assessing the individual needs of the participant, RETAINWORKS ensures that each participant has a plan that is tailored to the supports they need to successfully stay at work or return to work.

- Together, RETAINWORKS and Lindsay developed a SAW plan that provided services and supports in addition to those Lindsay received from workers’ compensation. The plan incorporated physical therapy and workplace modifications so Lindsay could continue teaching while she recovered from her injury.
- RETAINWORKS coached Lindsay on various options and strategies for following through on recommendations from her health-care provider. The regular check-ins and summaries of her health-care appointments kept Lindsay motivated and on track with her recovery and return to work after her first knee surgery.
- The tools and support Lindsay received from RETAINWORKS helped her successfully navigate a second knee surgery and quickly return to her job.

## RETAIN WORKS

*Kansas is participating in RETAIN (Retaining Employment and Talent After Injury/Illness Network) to build connections and improve coordination among employers, health-care providers, and other key parties to help workers with new injuries and illness stay in the workforce. The Kansas Department of Commerce leads RETAINWORKS in coordination with several partners. The US Department of Labor, in collaboration with the Social Security Administration, sponsors RETAIN.*

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